Poison Apples (Hallelujah)

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Poison Apples (Hallelujah)

by EarthsickWithoutYou

Summary

Special Agent Will Graham, the best profiler in the FBI, has a secret: he's actually a succubus, a demon who feeds on human flesh and blood, souls and sins to survive. Except that he feels so guilty about his "natural calling," Will doesn't kill until he's literally starving to death. Dr. Hannibal Lecter is called in to complete a profile on this unstable, brilliant young man, then immediately falls head over heels. Somehow, they both know that Hannibal has the sustenance to keep Will alive in every way...but how could that be?

Notes

cw: there's canon-typical violence scattered throughout. Numerous references to suicidal thoughts. And there is frequent mention of eating disorder-like symptoms and struggles, starvation and weight loss.

See the end of the work for more notes

Sweet Sacrifice

Hunger.

Humans don't even know what they're talking about when they say things like "I'm hungry."

Thirsty.
Parched.
Starving.
Famished.

Though nearly limitless in their imagination, humans were peculiarly myopic as to the presence of monsters among them – signifying, of course, that humans weren't at the top of the food chain, after all. They were ignorant, or else they chose to ignore the possibility even as it loomed distinctly, just out of eye-line.

Ego.
Fear.
Denial.
Human nature.

They could not know Will's pain, even fathom its barest essence, the never-ending torment it was to require human flesh, blood, and even spirit to survive. Most of all, he needed their sins. He needed to feed. He was starving.

Every day of his life he starved, just to try and avoid being that kind of monster, the one who considered others beneath him and feasted on them rather cheerfully or else with grimly matter-of-fact acceptance. Such were the ways of his kind, the succubi, demons who had their share of choices as to method, but no choice whatsoever as to the type of…meat.

Some waited for a chosen human to be asleep, then feasted on their dreams, seducing their subconscious, feeding off their taboo sexual desires. The moment of sublime mortal weakness occurred and the succubus descended from a waiting, pleased perch on the ceiling above them, claws and teeth extended.

Devouring, that was the way to describe what they did. They ate every single piece, every shred, they consumed everything that a person was, had ever been, and even their now ruined potential.

They were thieves and parasites, with the consensus in their underground community that it was easier once you let go of the guilt.

You could still connect with your victims and you both could taste real passion, pleasure unimaginable, indescribable, together, joined to the last. Their agony would never be unmixed with ecstasy, until it was over.

Wasn't that preferable to dying from a "stubborn" refusal to hunt properly, as Lucifer had designed them to do? Who was Will, after all, to flaunt his supposed "mercy" among his fellow succubi who did nothing worse than accept their nature.

But he did not want to point the accusing finger at his brethren, nor be one of them; he only desired freedom, whatever that might be, and he would never have it.

Lacking the bravery to end his own life, he dragged himself through it, coldly comforted with the knowledge that his days were numbered. That certainty sat sick in his stomach, nestled into the bile of starvation and dry-heave pangs of it. He still hunted, on occasion, when not doing so became more than he could bear, but he was getting better at withstanding the hunger, and the feasts were growing more infrequent.

Animal meat, especially if left bloody-rare, allowed a succubus to hold onto life, and perhaps for a few hours even feel nearly healthy, but that was all it afforded.

Sex with humans allowed the same, and for a while in his twenties, in denial of how finite the system must ultimately be, Will tried to stay alive that way, and in the way of his kind. Constantly eating, never full, screwing anyone who wanted him, he wore himself out. It was no kind of a life. He stopped being able to experience or taste and enjoy even the smallest bits of hollow joy once the thrill of a feeding had subsided. He felt like a skeleton, no matter how well-fed and well-fucked he was. Everything was empty.

He was just too guilty; he empathized with these humans and it hurt to hunt them like that. So, he gave up.

Since then, he'd endured long periods of fasting on a near-Catholic level of devotion, then he'd kill someone when he could wait no longer; he'd kill someone horrible who deserved to die. But if Will didn't meet someone like that soon, he was going to starve all the way down to nothing this time. He would not slay innocents.

He knew where to find the right kinds of victims, but he kept himself from doing it for as long as possible.

The abstinence went on and on like a stretched rubber band, which was all his empty belly felt like these days. No hope in sight. And he was truly going to die for these humans, who would never know he had sacrificed an immortal life he would have loved and enjoyed, all for those naive creatures who could not even imagine what it truly was to hunger.

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If someone had told him ahead of time what was going to happen on that bland autumn day which started out like so many others, days of tremendous suffering and a numb throb formally known as a heartbeat, he'd never have believed it.

But whether he wanted it or not or remembered what wanting felt like, love was on the way. It once would have seemed nothing more than a mean joke even to suggest such a thing.

He had accepted he'd never again love nor be loved a while back, probably around the time he had to find a new home for his dogs, rather than endanger them by keeping them in the house when a hunger spell got really bad.

Will didn't trust himself; he couldn't because he knew better. He found a dog-loving family on a farm not too far away, and he could even go and visit his pack of seven from time to time, but it wasn't the same.

The only love he'd ever felt or given was with his voracious, yet somehow neglectful parents, then friends who abandoned the rogue freak once he rebelled and stopped hunting for human prey.

He was roundly condemned by his own people as holier-than-thou for trying to resist the bloodlust, when he wasn't called a coward. Including his parents. Their immediate rejection showed Will their love had been shallow from the start.

Romantic love was a luxury made for Them, the strangely delicate yet enviable humans, so limited, so short-sighted and often even dull, but – possessing everything good that Will had taught himself to stop wanting. Like a life of his own or even the right to live any life at all.

Thus, a love life hadn't entered his mind in ages.

His existence, which he had regarded as one does the barest flicker on a burnt stub of a wick, ceased to have meaning once he forced himself to accept that this must be his fate.

Although he was meant to serve Lucifer by consuming sins, flesh, blood and guts, plus generally making mayhem, the more sexual and outrageous the better, wherever he went, Will felt neither loyalty nor hatred for his master.

Rather, as one of countless thousands of demons who were likely disposable to Satan, he still remembered that his master had begun his existence as an Angel.

If one were to trace the root of evil, it did not end with Lucifer. It went right back to the Almighty, who could have forgiven his rebellious angel, but chose otherwise. He could never forget that God made hell.

And so…he guessed it just didn't matter where he ended up, purgatory or hell. There was nothing to hope for except the fantasy of death being a long, dream-filled sleep where he got to live the human life he would have indulged to the fullest if he ever got a chance. He would not care if it was a fantasy and if it was false. He would take the lie, happily.

Often, this fantasy was the only blanket he had left to wrap around himself and keep out the freezing cold feeling of utter despair. Sometimes he even found comfort in it, if he could really concentrate and focus well enough. It happened on those nights when he'd just had red animal meat and got a fast but soon-ending rush of energy. Then he used all the energy up on concocting such rich and beautiful dreams.

Alone in his chair in his now desolate house, he conjured visions that he traveled the world as he pleased and tasted every delight the earth could offer, not needing to hurt humans to get

that chance.

He dreamed himself up a different family and group of friends who absolutely adored him and never ever left him all alone.

Lastly, he dreamed himself a lover, though he could never make out the man's face as clearly as the rest of the fantasy. Perhaps he could not come up with the right combination of features. Actors from films or the memory-images of past "Crushes" from his younger years when he still had a social circle to speak of just couldn't provide him what he was looking for.

This dream lover was the last piece of the fantasy he wanted to make sure he slotted into place before dying. Even if he didn't get the afterlife he craved, it was one last small, yet profound adventure to try and make sure it was perfect if it did come to pass.

He was getting himself ready.

So, he guessed he was ready for whatever happened, and knew even while dreaming his most exciting or soothing ideals, chances were much higher he'd be burning in eternity for the traitor he was to hell. Perhaps another sliver of pathetic hope lay in God choosing to put him in Purgatory, since he had at least tried to save human lives.

These mortals were so much more important to God than mere eternals. The Almighty had such endless mercy to grant the humans, seeing their many foolish blunders as adorable. But when you were created to be perfect and full of grace, the rules were quite different.

Demons and Angels were all created as overworked servants, essentially, created with built-in flaws that ensured they would malfunction and disappoint. But never forgiven as the mortals were, since they were not the preferred children in the family.

God must like it when they made mistakes; he seemed to thrive on harsh lessons. That was how Will ended up born a demon, not an angel, as would have been his natural lineage. God changed the rules for his own reasons, and Will never had a say, yet would likely pay a heavy cost merely for defying what he was.

Surely God used eternals and humans for his own amusement and entertainment, and to hear himself begged to and worshiped. Will was not sure what other reason he had for originally creating them in the first place, for He could have made himself a people who were equal to his own capacity for so-called "perfection."

Instead, he made a lot of messes and stuck names on them like *angel, demon, human.*| Nothing made sense to Will, except for reading stories about the Chesapeake Ripper, or trying to dream for as long as possible until the dream was all that remained of him.

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His life, however, wasn't over just yet.

A tiny crevice in the skin of the world continued to nurture the hopeless excuse for life that remained in Will Graham. And he could still be changed. Even saved.

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The cases were, of course, absurd.

Almost every time it was one of his kind, and he knew how to find them, sure as the rattle in his chest that passed for breathing and the flavorless limbo that served to demonstrate his continued fealty to the human race.

He did good deeds to protect those who would have been killed by his own kindred demons, no gratitude or pride in the job. It had to be done. It was just work. He couldn't take the guilt if he ignored the slaughter exploding all over the place whenever a group of succubi settled in the area.

But…there was one exception to his miserable days. This Ripper caught and held his interest in a dazed, lurid way he couldn't quite identify or understand.

This Ripper was human. Will was sure of it. Yet he committed crimes that were on par with demon-kind, and appeared remorseless, cold, calculating, quite pleased.

This Ripper was *hungry.*

Will felt so bizarre about it, as if it was his own hunger.

He still had an acute empathy that could cut him with its ruthless impressions, none of them good lately. The Ripper wasn't good, but he dared. He had such style and gracefulness, and he killed mostly evil ones.

So far as Will knew, he'd never killed a succubus or other demon, but he eliminated the ugliest cruelties and most disgusting rudeness with precision only to feast on their remains. Ironically, he had the life of a succubus without being one, except that he was better at it.

Will couldn't understand why he admired such a design. Yes, there was an envy, a wish that he could have been that free of remorse and guilt. He craved and *craved* for blood, skin, muscle and even bone every second of his life.

This man simply took what he wanted, and unlike the sloppy, greedy succubi Will had known, he made his murder victims into beautiful art, as if he could sculpt the world to his own whims, judging his preferences superior to all others.

The ego! The hubris! *The bravery.*

The Ripper owned who he was, fearlessly, and carried out acts that while severe, Will could understand and empathize with, perhaps a little too much.

The bedraggled, more than half-starved profiler had his own repressed rage, built up under his surface passivity. Yes, Will understood what it felt like to need vengeance against a mean

and ugly world, and to want the power to change it all until things made sense again. How powerless one felt when this wasn't possible, and the temptation to force it to work.

Will remembered the call of the hunt and the bloodlust, the clever, plotting, sneaking and stalking, teasing oneself before going in for the kill.

He often wished he could taste that coppery tang of sweet, thick blood in his mouth again and remembered how forbidden fruit always felt the best on his sensitive palette. But even in his younger days when he'd hunted, the guilt and sadness of the aftermath had blotted out the joy by suggesting it was unforgivable greed and gluttony.

He missed the greed and gluttony and the Ripper reminded him why.

The Ripper took the broken world and snapped it back into place with surgical precision, then made art of it to repay the earth in beauty for the cost of his sins. Symmetrical, clean, yet so raw. It made Will feel that way, and then he felt more ravenous than ever.

While confused over the unwanted idolization his heart bestowed on the Ripper, Will couldn't deny that he often tried to imagine what the man looked like. His profile had only been able to determine a few basic points, male, late forties or early fifties, tall, fit, somehow exotic. Mysterious. He'd love to hear that mysterious voice panting in his ear. But he was frustrated, as he could not imagine exactly how the voice sounded.

Will shivered at the thoughts but tried not to identify the feelings. Deep down, he knew that if he could determine exactly what the Ripper looked like, he would cast this killer as his one true love in his foolish, cherished dream.

And deeper down, where Will felt perhaps the rawest of all, he would rather that the Ripper killed him than to die like this, slowly wasting away.

He was ugly now, too skinny, pale-skinned. He looked sickly and he knew it was disgusting. At least now the outside mirrored the truth of what he was within and kept most humans at bay where they were safe.

The Ripper…Will knew the Ripper could make him beautiful again, one last time. One last time that would feel like forever.

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"Dr. Lecter, please," Jack Crawford urged under his breath, hands hooked into his pockets in the hallway of the FBI office suite at Quantico. "I'm at my wit's end."

"Surely you can't be," Hannibal chuckled, "You're far too clever for that, Jack."

"I'm not an expert at this. Something is happening to Will Graham and it's not right. It's as if he's withering away one day, then the next he looks alright, and the next worse than ever! I'm worried."

"I only came by to drop off the whiskey, as a 'thank you' gesture for considering my input on the recent case." Hannibal had assumed his amusing "work" on the matter was done, but Jack

Crawford had called a second time, and a vague interest in the new hobby of FBI profiling compelled Hannibal to see what it might be about. “If this isn’t about a profile…”

“It is and it isn’t. And thank you, the whiskey is beautiful.”

“Don’t forget to share it with Bella. What did you say this wild, impish profiler’s name was again?”

“Impish?” Jack laughed, though still looking tired. “Don’t let him hear you say that, doctor. It’s Special Agent Will Graham. Ex-cop out of New Orleans. Natural genius for profiling, overly vivid imagination gets him in some painful scrapes. He’s a good one, put in years for us catching the worst of the worst. Very nearly got us the Shrike once already and sure to be the one to bring the bastard down in the end. He’s leading the Ripper investigation, too, under my supervision.”

“He has a lot of responsibility on his plate,” Hannibal said with surprise as his lips curved in an entertained, but not overly enthused smile.

This Will Graham did sound intriguing, but it wasn’t that easy to hold the cold, smooth doctor’s interest. He was notoriously picky and nothing had yet suggested this case would be anything extraordinary. Perhaps he stayed out of curiosity to see this unstable young man who was hunting him.

“Not much on his plate but responsibility and unearned guilt, far as I can tell. He looks like he’s starving himself to cope.”

“I’m not a medical doctor anymore, Jack,” Hannibal said seriously.

He mainly mentioned it as another point of amusement to please himself. Of course, he used his surgical skills quite frequently, if in a different way than during his time working in the ER. And he did so enjoy his admirable, noble cover story…

“Eating disorders are a matter for psychologists, first and foremost.”

Jack’s know-it-all smile was convincing. He really was a master of manipulation; it takes one to know one, after all. Hannibal had to admire Agent Crawford’s impressive abilities, even if he was not quite on the “good” doctor’s own level. No one was on Hannibal’s level, after all.

“Sometimes,” Hannibal allowed, “Depending on how long –”

Jack just opened his office door and gestured for Hannibal to go in, so they could continue the discussion. He didn’t even stop talking the whole time.

“And if Will has passed the point where counseling would help, and has progressed to the place where he needs medical assistance first, you, a man skilled in both fields, would be able to assess that.”

“Agent Crawford,” Hannibal admitted, putting his hands up in surrender as he sank into a chair in front of Jack’s desk, “I believe that is checkmate. When can I meet with Will Graham?”

Just then, there was a knock on the door and Jack's enthusiastic smile broadened. "Right now, actually."

Hannibal shot him a reproving, but amused look. "You were fairly certain you could convince me to meet him."

"To know Will Graham is to care about helping him," Jack said quietly, to avoid being overheard. "Trust me."

Hannibal gave a short nod, notably intrigued by now about the unseen young man who was about to appear before him after such a remarkable description from Jack Crawford. The head of the Behavioral Sciences unit was not known for sentimentality; indeed quite the opposite, though Bella Crawford would attest otherwise with wry humor and affectionate truth.

Something in this Agent Graham had piqued the usually dormant caring side of Jack. And Hannibal could guess the fuller explanation of Jack's point that to know Will was to want to help him: that one would have to be heartless not to feel moved to help.

Wasn't Hannibal heartless? He'd asked himself that question a great many times, in quiet moments of personal reflection, without being able to achieve a satisfying answer. Without being quite sure he wanted to know.

"Come on in, Will," Jack called in his deep, fatherly "boss" tone. He switched so easily from a friendly and convincing chat with his occasional consultant and trusted friend Dr. Lecter, to a more paternal and authoritative voice used towards Agent Graham.

"Dr. Lecter," Jack continued, gesturing at the man who had just come into the office, "Allow me to introduce you to the finest profiler I've ever had the pleasure to work with. This is Special Agent Will Graham. Will, this is Dr. Hannibal Lecter, an accomplished psychiatrist and retired surgeon. I thought – well, Alana Bloom thought, and told me, he would be the ideal person to bring in on our tougher cases. Just to have one more unique perspective."

Jack laughed affably. "I agreed." He added more seriously, "We can always use another brilliant mind on a case like this, although your work, Will, has been nothing short of exceptional."

Will sighed heavily. His entire being seemed to say wanly, Whatever.

"Indeed, so I've heard, and I'm sure if anything you've undersold this young man's contributions. Hello, Agent Graham," Hannibal said, almost breathless the moment he laid curious eyes on the young man. He wasn't sure why the foolish compliment flew out of his mouth like that, without his permission.

Luckily, Jack didn't make any special note of it, probably writing it off as a gentle joke jabbing at his keeping Will's talents "a secret" so as to monopolize the profiler's time and talents. And Will was too distracted to do much except look cagey and eager to be gone from the room, not having expected a stranger to deal with.

Hannibal put his hand out and the profiler shook it quickly, with disinterested hurry and a nod, no eye contact. Instead, Will scanned Dr. Lecter the way an alien spacecraft might scan the planet for signs of immediate danger. Apparently designating the new acquaintance as benign for now, Graham took up his seat without any further attention to Dr. Lecter.

The Ripper, to his surprise, had a hard time not simply staring. He tried to focus on drinking his coffee or looking at the murder-board on the wall across from Jack's desk as the supervisor began going over the latest clues on the Shrike case.

His eyes kept flitting right back to Will as if that was the most natural place to put his gaze, and the only act that would make him happy which was allowed at the moment. Almost inquisitive towards his own senses and perceptions, he allowed himself to soak in the boy's appearance, mannerisms and other traits almost shamelessly.

Hannibal wondered why his body seemed to automatically respond without warning to the cloudy blue and sage green shades in large, heartbreaking, sad eyes fringed in long, dark lashes, or soft ivory skin patched with pink flushed cheeks – Will was overheated; he was sweating constantly and twitching, fidgeting. But he was freezing to death at the same time. Something was wrong with the boy, as Crawford had warned him. Will was sick.

He was skin and bones, obviously quite a bit below the healthy recommended weight for a man of…about five foot ten, Hannibal estimated. He had once been a vigorous, strong young police detective, but something had happened to change that.

Gaunt and touchy, Will was a walking open wound. But he had tumbles of soft chestnut curls framing a stunning face, and he resembled a Botticelli angel, a beauty freshly unfurled from a large ocean shell, yet pursued by hellfire. A Venus from the flames. He was…unusual. Even a marvel.

The body which had been undernourished for so long that he did look in danger of worse than fainting (that was a constant threat) was nonetheless the most exquisitely attractive one Hannibal had ever seen outside of an idealized Florentine painting from his favored Renaissance era, and yet Will was more ideal. Even withdrawn, miserable, and despite this… veil of deadly sadness hanging over his entire aura with a foreboding pall, Will Graham was so beautiful.

All of a sudden, Hannibal's heart began beating so hard he genuinely worried for several seconds that seemed to freeze time – if he was going to have a heart attack. It was, as he knew logically, within the next few moments of careful breathing and masking his feelings, merely a response of frantic shock at emotions that he'd never experienced on this level before.

Will was sad and it made Hannibal sad. It made Hannibal "disinterested, superior" Lecter feel so moved to help the boy that he almost stumbled over his words in order to avoid making immediate offers of this nature. He wanted to take Will home with him and take care of him, nurture and…and…love him. Love him back to life.

He never would have guessed that it would be the sight of death that finally caused him to feel fully alive.

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Of course, they were still discussing the case. Hannibal allowed his own responses to skitter like stones over the waters of the conversation, offering quiet wisdom and reasonable theories.

He concealed that he was there to examine Will's mental and physical health. Normally, his instinct and pleasure would be to poke at the surly young profiler until inevitably Will lost his temper.

It was more than obvious his beauty would only be enhanced when he was angry, so that in the visions of loving Will that now played in his memory palace like an alarming new film stuck on a loop, Hannibal gave in during every fight.

He would always rather give Will what he wanted than get his own way. What about making Will smile? How gorgeous he would be. Hannibal didn't know why he had ever entertained other priorities.

Remaining polite, he nonetheless concluded from Will's body language, facial expressions and the shaky tone of his voice, this beautiful boy held a savagery within him with shameful conviction. Will had sentenced himself to a grey and banal life when it was clear to Hannibal, he would thrive on a hunt, a ruthless kill, the sacramental ritual of artistically displaying the victim, then cooking and eating the remains.

It was more than possible that Hannibal conjured the theory of Will's secret murderous desires to fulfill his own unsettling and insistent fantasies of claiming that curly-haired, sickly angel for his very own lover, his darling, his everything. It was yet likelier that he himself was insane, triggered somehow by Will's mere presence. He felt crazy, he felt unpredictable.

Because, he realized, keeping a calm and serene expression, Will was unpredictable. And now, Hannibal's own joy in life depended on an unpredictable, volatile creature who was currently snapping out a plan for pursuing the shrike, almost as if Jack Crawford worked for him.

Jack, however, gave Hannibal a subtle, pointed look as if to say, "See?" and nodded, allowing Will to be grumpier and more disrespectful than he would have if he was not so worried for the profiler's health.

"Absolutely," Jack agreed, "You and Dr. Lecter should fly out to Minnesota, question the workers, see if we can't discover this doting dad."

Will stared at the fanned out images of dead girls with pretty auburn hair and endearing, wind-chafed skin. He clung to the arms of the chair and nodded, grinding his teeth almost audibly. "We can still save the golden ticket, the Shrike's daughter, and that's reason enough. C'mon."

He now gestured unceremoniously at Hannibal, as if assuming the therapist was dead weight, potentially slowing down his investigation. Hannibal was, instead, dismayed and worried at

the fact that without him, Will might have traveled alone this far, in his current state – he should barely be flying at all.

Yet he and Jack both knew that if they pushed Will to rest, to stay here instead of flying to catch the Shrike, save the threatened daughter of this killer, Will would not only refuse, he'd avoid them both and never let them close enough to help him.

They must be cautious.

The methodical Hannibal now puzzled over how to be methodical when his heart and soul cried out for him to care for Will now, not to wait and watch him remain in this state.

It was a frightening, confusing way of thinking, and he didn't know why he was so eager to help when to hurt and toy with this adorable trinket of a genius boy would be more entertaining and safer to his own concerns.

It simply could not be prevented, and so he tried not to dwell on asking why his heart was not simply present, but also beating for, and dependent on a boy who barely seemed to notice he was alive.

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Will was, no question, delicious in his ill state. The perspiration glittering on his skin made it shiny, while the circles under his eyes made them stand out so brightly blue, and the way his body kept moving in little nervous, upset twitches without his permission was fascinating.

Hannibal had that very darkness in him that would love to be the puppet master to a doll version of Will, tie him up and play games with him, how beautifully he would suffer! How stunning, when he finally broke.

How delectable he would be, in the end, on Hannibal's tongue, delighting his palette. Will would finally be at peace, and Hannibal wouldn't have to worry about all this foolish "falling in love" and "besotted at first sight" nonsense anymore.

But the half-hearted visions of making Will a victim died on the vine before they produced any motivation for him to fall back on his typical Ripper habits. Hannibal remained perplexed, but kept himself a quiet, steady source of responsible, trustworthy, intelligent company by the boy's side.

Will smelled…like violets and lavender right before they wilted, which was the moment of their peak beauty and aroma…oh, Hannibal felt he'd drown in that sweetly fevered smell, which was mixed in with another scent that shouldn't be possible. His keen olfactory senses had never led him astray, and he was quite sure this was an accurate identification.

As if the most vivid and luscious red rose had been frozen, then set on fire, and Hannibal was smelling the fumes. It was not a human scent. He could almost believe this was a true, dark angel. At the very least, he knew Will was his soulmate, burning on a funeral pyre before his eyes and shivering almost convulsively.

Hunger makes a body cold.

Starvation sets off fever symptoms at the same time. In a way, the peculiar and hypnotic scent made sense, but Hannibal couldn't shake the feeling that Will was more than human. He didn't even believe in God beyond needing someone to blame and mock for the plights of his own sad early life, and the cruel way people must suffer needlessly in the name of some most likely nonexistent master plan full of "mysterious ways."

He only believed in God to defy him, but there was something of the angel and devil about this boy that bewitched him with an overpowering sense of divine grace, all laced through with seductive and ravenous danger.

It was absurd, but Hannibal began to really believe Will was more than human, without being able to take it further into a realm he was only beginning to give credence to with hesitant feelings soon shifting to fascinated need. A need to be near Will. It felt supernatural. It felt like intoxication.

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On the flight to Minnesota, Will sat by the window at Hannibal's polite insistence and spent most of the flight looking down through a pair of endearing glasses at the case files. Then he restlessly tried to get comfortable, refusing Hannibal's offer of the extra pillow and blanket he always brought along when traveling.

"I'm fine, thanks," he mumbled, as if surprised he bothered to tack on the "thanks."

"'*To edge his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance,*'" Hannibal smiled, allowing just a hint of his feelings to show, attempting to portray it as a desire for friendship and human connection for now.

"Dickens?" Will heaved a sigh and looked at him more properly than he had before. This whole time, which was an entire afternoon and most of the night, Will had been mostly in Hannibal's presence and occasionally participating in quiet collaboration, but he had never yet looked at his companion full-on.

He paused and took off his glasses, shaking his head. "It's not antisocial, I'm just not cold and I don't uh…"

"Like pillows?" Hannibal offered, his smile growing just a little. His eyes lit up warmly, showing the little creases beside them that he was slightly self-conscious about.

"Maybe I don't," Will insisted gruffly, though he'd met Hannibal's eyes for several beats before carefully, intently letting his eyes travel over the older man's face and body, taking in each detail.

He tore the crystal wonderment of his stare away, to Hannibal's near-desperate regret, and shrugged.

“Listen, it’s a nice thought and I appreciate it, but I do fine on my own, okay?” Will didn’t wait for an answer.

Instead, he closed his eyes as if doing so would make Hannibal forget how wide they had been moments before, when fixed on his own. Those soft, dark lashes fanned against his ivory skin with a gentle flutter despite Will’s stiff posture which forbade Hannibal from responding or further pursuing any assistance, much less potential friendship.

Will shivered again, then his head tipped to one side and he fell into whatever dreams filled the mind of such an incomparably unique boy.

It took everything in Hannibal not to cover Will’s skinny, shivering form with the blanket, nor take the sweet boy under his arm until Will’s face could press to his chest for a more comfortable slumber, feeling safe and protected.

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Will pretended he was still asleep for a while so he could watch the peculiar Dr. Lecter and continue forming a profile of the man in his own mind.

Hmm, maybe forty-nine, fifty, eloquent and observant, almost too polite, but somehow it seems sincere. As if it’s covering something up but isn’t devoid of good intentions.

Lithuanian, probably aristocracy by his bearing, fancy-ass clothes and a few things he said when he was blabbing on and on and I pretended not to listen like I’m pretending to be asleep right now.

He looks like a count, with those chiseled cheekbones and such golden skin. I didn’t know a man could have so many colors in his hair, silver and golden-blonde and brown, and he’s odd, he sticks out like this dazzling sore thumb, this bizarrely charming, overly pleasant man. All that elegance and the meticulous way he’s packed, I bet he lives his whole life that way.

Will almost laughed, for the first time in ages, when he pictured Dr. Lecter in bed sleeping, wearing another three-piece suit. He forced the laugh back down and made himself remain serious. There was an important question he needed to consider, so he should stop with the lingering analysis of Dr. Lecter’s appearance.

He should *not* think about how silky and intriguing his deep, rumbling voice and sophisticated accent were. Nor ponder the very ponderous, big hands which had caught his eye almost immediately after meeting the man. He’d never seen such beautiful–

That doesn’t matter, stop it. Focus.

Why is he really here?

***

“You were asleep, so I ordered you the beef bourguignon,” said Hannibal with that same annoyingly helpful attitude that kept making shivers go down Will’s spine.

Shivers that didn't feel like his hungry, cold twitches. They felt almost like an excitement that his body could conjure, slightly, if not follow through on. He was weak, exhausted, close to the edge. And he knew, he knew there was a risk that he'd fucking snap again soon and take a human victim. The rare occurrences of his recent hunts were haphazard, since they were never enacted for his own pleasure as was the design of him.

His design was too ugly for this world. He had to wipe himself off the slate, but his ravenous body sometimes had other ideas, and then he'd stay out late at night at bars until he'd inevitably see a predator, someone drugging a drink or harassing their ex who they were clearly going to hurt if he didn't move, and quickly, to stop them.

And he'd follow them home, eyes going blood red in the darkness as he simply devoured them, along with every one of their vices and sins. It felt like the closest thing to happiness he'd ever been able to imagine, because the sins made him bloom into health, if only for a short time. The nourishment had him looking and feeling much better for several days, then slowly ebbed away until he became the starved wretch currently sitting beside the strange therapist.

"I wasn't planning to eat," he fussed, to avoid saying "thank you." He cupped the back of his stiff neck and rolled his head around to undo some of the tense knots. He rolled his shoulders.

His bones cracked with every bit of tension he very temporarily healed, and Dr. Lecter looked at him, momentarily stunned.

Will was literally falling apart before his eyes, and it wasn't exactly an easy thing to conceal. Then again, he sighed, he might as well eat. Red meat would make him strong enough to catch the Shrike, and he wanted to do that before he left; he needed to save the girls who would be future victims otherwise.

"I think you should eat," Dr. Lecter answered firmly, almost sternly. It was pretty obvious he hadn't meant to say that but it just came out anyway. He seemed nervous, but then schooled his features to look calm as ever.

Butterflies, there were butterflies in Will's empty stomach, swirling as warmth such as he'd not felt in years began to cascade through his frozen, desolate form. The body he'd given up on was still capable of feeling attraction, even arousal. He was dizzy, but concealed it by closing his eyes and stretching again, shaking it off.

"You're not my dad," Will reminded him drily.

He put on his glasses, then gestured to the stewardess, requesting a coffee with his…what was it at this point? He guessed dinner. He'd gotten some hours mixed up. The beef would help.

Will ate it so quickly that Dr. Lecter chuckled softly, though he made no comment on the fact that his companion really had been starving, and his own advice had been heeded.

Lecter looked oddly pleased that Will was eating. There was something about that. Lecter's prim, cute smile and eyes shining at him – why was he looking at Will like that? This

handsome, refined gentleman couldn't feel the same attraction, not when Will looked like a disgusting, pasty old bag of bones and exhibited all the charm of an angry electric eel.

But the tension simmering between them was palpable. He finished the meal, licked his lips and sighed. Oh, God, it was just like sex when he devoured a human, gorged on sin and darkness. This meal was nothing by comparison, such a pathetic substitute, but it would have to do. He felt a slight increase in his energy and focus.

He used it to ask Dr. Lecter, "Why are you really here?"

"Whatever do you mean?" Lecter smirked, actually smirked.

Fuck, that was cute, too. Shit, I can't…

"Jack has you stalking me like this to work up a profile, probably examine me medically, hands free since I'm such a surly unbroken pony. Right? It's no coincidence that you're both a psychiatrist and a medical doctor."

"Former," Lecter corrected him archly. "It's true that Agent Crawford has charged me with looking out for you during this journey and our upcoming adventure. I didn't expect to find the job to be quite such an honor."

He had blurted an unexpected truth again, and now his cheeks turned pink.

Lecter blinked quickly a few times in surprise at his own teenager-with- a-crush behavior. Then he added, "I promise I can carry it out without pestering you, or at least keeping it to a minimum. God forbid we become friendly, after all."

Will groaned, "Just keep it professional, alright?"

And that goes for you, he said to himself even as the butterflies took flight again. He was almost hard; it would take almost nothing, just one more irresistible dose of Lecter, to get him rock-hard right then. Fuck.

"Of course. You know, Will, I think Uncle Jack thinks of you as a fragile little teacup. One on the very top shelf, only brought down for special occasions, and carefully at that."

Will looked at him frankly for a few seconds and then burst into laughter without being able to help it. He put his hand on his stomach where the butterflies, warmth, and now genuine, innocent, delightful humor were gathering. Dizzy again, he grabbed the seat in front of him.

"How do you see me?" he asked curiously, partly to defer any questions about his dizzy spells, which were growing more apparent even after having eaten the red meat.

He'd starved himself too thoroughly by now to be satiated by such a meager joke of a meal.

"The mongoose I want under the house when the snake slithers by," Lecter said, thoughtful and intent.

In that moment he had Will on pins and needles wanting to know how Lecter could See him like that, and yet instead of making him aware of his own depraved ugliness, it made him feel lovely and admired.

***

Twenty-four hours later. Hobbs Residence.

Will shot Hobbs ten times with a sick glee coursing through him. It momentarily invigorated him, like a bomb that went off. He felt so alive for a few moments of brutal ecstasy; the quiet power of taking a life for all the right reasons made him feel like a man, a good man, someone redeemable and worthy.

Elation and excitement came just from the vicious thrill of killing, no doubt about that. He stuffed the forbidden feelings away, already getting far too tired again, a day on from the red meat.

He used what strength he had left to kneel quickly and press his hands to the girl's throat. Abigail Hobbs. What a pretty girl, with sweet, clever eyes. She was a good person; he was literally designed to detect it on a human. It was supposed to make him walk away and choose a more suitable victim to feast on. She didn't have enough sins.

He couldn't let her die. But his hands were shaking terribly.

Her blood still smelled good enough to eat, despite the fact that her sins were so few. There was definitely one big sin, a lie of omission that weighed heavily on her…then a feeling of unease and guilt, as if she'd been somehow complicit in her father's crimes, perhaps? All of these intense, frightened feelings were quite sufficient to make Will's stomach roar with hunger. Red flashed in his eyes but Abigail was too weak and convulsing to notice it.

There was so much blood, gushing everywhere, how could he save her, he couldn't get a firm enough grip–

Lecter appeared behind him, swiftly joining him on the floor. With a confidence and a competence that made Will feel dizzy again, Lecter simply moved Will's hand away then wrapped his own hand around Abigail's throat and stopped the bleeding.

His hand was so enormous, he easily encompassed the girl's slender throat.

Then he said quietly to her, in a way you could actually believe, "You're going to survive, Abigail. We'll help you. Just hold on."

Her eyes showed a bold refusal to die, and that was good enough.

But when Hannibal said "just hold on," he glanced at Will, at the blood-splattered chaos that was Will. The profiler still saw red, through the drops of crimson all over his glasses. He was trembling almost as severely as Abigail was, taken over by too many different, conflicting feelings: the joy of killing a bad man, the hunger to eat his kill, as was his natural right and

calling, the work it was not to do that, and the problem of how hungry he was for Abigail's blood at the moment.

And Dr. Lecter, whether he meant to or not, had somehow burrowed under Will's skin. His presence steadied Will and made him feel special. It was terrifying. He loved it, wanted it. What was happening? The world tilted and swayed.

"I – I have to –"

"Of course," Lecter answered gently, "Go and find the medics, they can help you get cleaned up, give you something for any pain you may have incurred."

"Right," Will said breathlessly.

He got up on wobbly legs and made them move just enough so he could slip out the back slider door that led to a well-maintained and peaceful-looking yard. Then, back pressed to the house, out of view from any potential onlookers, with his boots planted on bright, nicely cut and fragrant grass he stuck his hand deep into his mouth and tasted the fresh blood.

There was some that belonged to Garret Jacob Hobbs and some from Abigail, all mixed together. In the sloppy remnants of Hobbs' blood, only a little of his brain matter lay precious in Will's palm to be licked voraciously into his mouth, so much sin, so much – pain and violence, such selfishness and depravity. Abigail's guilt, her lies and numb compliance – he felt – he felt –

He felt so alive.

He sucked each finger wildly, then lapped at his hands like a dog until they were clean; then he ripped off his shirt and gobbled any human remains he could get off that. Embarrassed by now, he licked his glasses, taking in the last delectable drops of blood and leaving a dirty smear on the lenses.

Okay, okay. That was ridiculous and silly. But it felt good. And he hadn't hurt anyone by feeding that way.

He brought himself back carefully, knowing that when he fed, he was often unreasonable for hours afterward, but this had not been a full feeding, just a cruelly teasing appetizer course. Thus, Will had not succumbed to that ecstasy of brutal lust that came with a real feast.

He could still get himself composed and return to work. He put a hand on his hammering heartbeat and breathed, regulating it to be gradually more steady. He closed his eyes and allowed a moment's savoring of the aftertaste, mingled with the vision of Lecter's warm hand controlling his own, the scent of Lecter's manly, spicy cologne and the dizzy feeling of his gentle flirtations. It wasn't that he was happy, but he remembered what happiness felt like.

It haunted him, and he cried briefly into his hands, keeping it to a few sobs he just had to get out. He couldn't have happiness, of course. He was a danger to Lecter, who seemed to have skeletons in his closet. Sins. Will could smell that, too. If he hung around too much, he'd be too keen to taste it.

Something about Lecter, though, made him too hard to resist.

The doctor found Will, shirtless under a grey blanket provided by the medics, briefing some fellow agents about what had happened. There were agents everywhere, it seemed, scattered all over the Hobbs' property gathering clues, discussing what they had found, caring for the victims, getting rid of the bodies. Hannibal had helped Abigail to the ambulance. He was going with her. He put a hand on Will's arm first, still very gentle. A pained smile, which Will inevitably returned, eyes glistening with yearning.

"I'll call you," Lecter promised, "Keep you apprised."

Will nodded. "Okay, thanks."

***

The next day, Will couldn't help waking up and going right to the hospital.

He was terribly worried about Abigail and felt worse about tasting her blood with such pleasure while she had just lost both parents and nearly died herself, under such traumatic conditions. To be so twisted and admire those who were better than him despite the lowness of mortality and the fragility of their existence was an awful feeling.

He felt like himself again, in other words.

Then he stepped into Abigail Hobbs' hospital room and found Dr. Lecter…Hannibal…sitting at her side. Abigail and Hannibal were both fast asleep, and her small, pale hand was clasped in his, a soothing gesture. He'd been there to make the time less completely horrific for this young woman.

His face in repose was heart-breaking because he was so handsome. Every human flaw made him more so, small lines on his skin reflecting maturity that only aroused Will until he was defenseless to the sensation. The silver in his hair looked distinguished, and he believed no man had ever been quite so good-looking.

Hannibal would be pleased to see him when he woke up, Will allowed himself to think. His heart skipped a beat because – he knew that this was actually true.

So he went and sat in the chair on the other side of the girl's bed and looked at them both. He felt calm again. Like finding safe harbor in the eye of a storm.

He suddenly didn't feel like himself, but someone who deserved nice things. Someone who the world would actually be worse off without. A hero, a good person, all the things he knew he was not and never could be. He just…felt it anyway, somehow. Hannibal made him feel that way.

After a night of restless tossing and turning left him with a scant three hours of sleep, he felt relaxed now, and safe. He closed his eyes.

***

“Abigail seems a bit perplexed by our concern, even suspicious,” Will observed a day later when he and Hannibal were leaving after a second hospital visit. “I guess I can’t blame her.”

“From her perspective, it merely seems as if we are trying to play father to make up for what we took away from her.”

Hannibal spoke smoothly, but he kept stealing small glances at Will’s profile that made the younger man blush.

Sated by the Hobbs family’s blood, Will looked slightly better than usual, although the vigor from his impromptu and insufficient feeding was already beginning to fade. He found that he would rather enjoy these last few hours, as he estimated, of good, healthy energy instead of locking himself in for another forlorn night of self-condemnation.

“Do you think she’s right?” Will cupped his chin and rubbed his stubbled face.

They were standing beside the rented car which Hannibal had used to drive them to the hospital from the dingy motel they were still staying in.

It was a grey, drizzly day, nothing marvelous to be sure, and yet the way Hannibal looked at him made the dull, light rain picturesque. As if this was one of those stupid, romantic movies and they were about to kiss right there with their lips slightly moist.

Hannibal made everything seem grand, like an adventure, and furthermore, one where Will could be there with him, and know he was safe.

Hannibal explained, “I think she’s partly right, and she’s an extremely clever girl to make such a clear conclusion in her current state of grief. It will be best for us to tread carefully, though I must admit, I feel compelled to keep watch over her. As if I don’t trust others to do so properly, and it does not sit well with me.”

“Yeah, exactly.” Will hugged himself for a moment to avoid falling into Hannibal’s strong arms and fading into his long-cherished dream, which now had its leading man cast. He released the brief grip on himself and added curiously, “Feeling paternal?”

“Yes, and obliged, strangely, to make amends towards Abigail for helping in the investigation and discovery which ultimately took her father’s life. Even knowing it was the only course we could have taken in the circumstances.”

Will nodded, hoping there was some way they (himself, Hannibal and Abigail) could still be…if not a family or whole, at least in each other’s lives. He had now decided that he might have a life ahead of him, after all. Maybe.

“Will? If you don’t mind my saying so, you must be famished. You look wan, and I can *hear* your belly rumbling.” Hannibal approached, hovering right outside Will’s personal space in his handsome suit with the collar popped against the rain, silver hair gleaming with the gentle dampness.

His eyes showed total openness. With a playful smile when Will blushed and looked away, Hannibal added, “Now, to a man like me, who prides himself on his cooking, it would be a disgrace to leave you in such a state, while knowing I can help.”

“If you cook for me, isn’t that…are we getting too friendly? I didn’t expect this to come up, but, em…you were sent by Jack to keep an eye on me, in a professional capacity.”

“That includes your appetite, cunning boy.” Hannibal watched with enjoyment as Will’s blush deepened and he bit his lip. “But I will tell you a secret, since after we return to Maryland, our professional association can reasonably be severed.”

“What’s the secret?” Will laughed.

“Before our flight, I want to take you out for dinner in whatever is the best of the airport’s doubtless meager restaurant options, and I want to see you well-fed. Then, once I sign off on being your temporary caretaker and let Jack know you’re quite sane and balanced, that you eat and sleep as you should, because I’m going to make sure that you do…”

Will’s heart stopped and then skipped and then started and did the same thing twice more as he listened to Hannibal.

“Once that is done, I intend, with your permission, to have you over to my own house one evening – very soon – for a solid, home-cooked meal. I want to make you the very best of what I have to offer, and see you enjoy it.”

He was serious, well, he was flirting, but he meant every damn word. Will couldn’t believe this was happening, yet it seemed that Hannibal happened to have a kinky fixation on the very problem that was secretly at the heart of Will’s ordeal: his appetite. Hannibal wouldn’t be happy until he saw a well-nourished Will Graham, and then, especially if he had made the food himself, he would be elated.

“Are you asking me on a date, Dr. Lecter?” Will inquired.

He had meant to flirt back in a wry tone, but instead, it came out as a needy whisper that made Hannibal step forward and clasp both his arms, as if with a sense of ownership.

Was it Will’s desperate look, his own strangely powerful passion, the leftover confusion of feelings from the day before, or the unexpectedly cinematic setting of the gloomy day with its cold wind that seemed to make it easier to draw nearer to each other?

Yes, I think, Will thought dazedly, *is the answer to that.*

Hannibal leaned in with no further ado and kissed him, clasping Will’s face in his hand and stroking his jaw, his ear, while the other hand threaded slowly through his damp curls.

It was soft, rain-wet and tender. Hannibal drew back with a smile and twinkling eyes that seemed magical. Will knew that real witchcraft did exist, light and dark, but this mortal needed no such trappings of supernatural trickery to be the most magical person he could ever imagine.

“Do you want to go on a date with me, Will?” Hannibal grinned, showing his cute fangs, and kept his face tilted at the right angle for kissing, bent slightly since they had a small but highly enjoyable height difference between them. His lips and warm breath were inches from Will’s lips and he longed for more. He breathed Hannibal in; the man had replaced oxygen.

He laughed nervously, “I don’t know that it’s fair to make me answer when you never did, to my original question.”

“That’s too bad, my dear,” Hannibal smirked, and kissed him more soundly. “Do you want to go on a d–”

“Yes,” Will laughed brightly this time, “Yes, just…shut up and kiss me already, goddammit.”

Hannibal smiled as if the heavens had shone their light on him by sending Will. He couldn’t possibly suspect that in his warm and protective embrace he held a filthy little demon boy who had never, ever been loved.

He kissed Will as if he could make him clean. As if love was a redemptive baptism. For he was, Will realized when Hannibal went on kissing him with such soft, tentative, sexy care, and as he kissed back while trying not to cry too much at the pain of such happiness and pleasure, he was in love with Hannibal.

Was this really how it happened, out of nowhere, so fast, so unrealistically, but so real? Until it was all you had or wanted, and you had to hold on tight, never let go? Like the stupid movies?

He didn’t know anything about love, but he was in it.

Hannibal wrapped his coat around Will and drew him closer so the coat covered them both. His kisses went on, warm and delighted, savoring every moment of tasting Will’s lips and teasing with more light nibbles and hints of his tongue. He held Will and kissed him, as if they were the only ones in the whole universe.

Will cried a little more, which was dumb considering this was just an ill-advised affair with a sort-of colleague, but he had never been this happy, so he couldn’t help it.

Hannibal didn’t comment on it, but kissed the tears away and nuzzled their noses together before claiming Will’s mouth in a firmer kiss that felt like reassurance.

And Will had the giddy, floating sensation that came with feeling as if he’d never be cold again.

Till I tasted you...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

New relationships were known to be hard work. Not that Hannibal had ever been in a truly romantic relationship of any kind, never mind a serious one. All of his wisdom regarding love came second-hand, via his deep immersion in the arts, where it was heavily idealized, and his work as a therapist, where he often heard only the worst possible results of such affection.

He had assumed both to be exaggerations, unnecessary weakness which he wisely side-stepped. During meetings with clients who rambled on about their "love lives," he often tuned out, bored. That had changed ever since he met Will Graham.

He found himself bringing Will into almost any conversation where it was possible to do without being absolutely inappropriate. This included asking his patients probing questions about their love issues that were really questions about himself and Will. Hannibal's view of love was very much that of an alien trying to understand unfamiliar sensations taking him over, *human* sensations.

It wasn't easy to admit he had fallen head over heels at first sight, like any ill-fated lover in one of his classic literary poems or novels, whom he would have laughed at while enjoying a glass of wine in his own, cozy, neat library *alone.*

He lived his life alone but never lonely; it was a sort of unspoken motto of his not to need anyone else, but now, he was lonely without Will.

The fact of Will's hunger had a lot to do with Hannibal's ability to take action and open up about his own feelings sooner than later. If Will had been ill in any other way, he could have held back and played games to try and avoid falling deeper, avoid becoming too emotionally dependent or vulnerable.

But when he looked at how starvation had rendered the beautiful young profiler weak, pale and unstable, he could not bear to let it continue. Nor could he hold back the traumatic memories of Mischa's last days and his own subsequent days of starvation in the freezing cold, in shock over the horrific things he'd witnessed and been made to participate in, grieving for the family he did not even fully understand he'd lost.

Looking at Will, hearing how the boy's belly rumbled and the taste of good, solid, nourishing food put color back in his cheeks, depth back into his voice, strength in his body, Hannibal quickly grew obsessed with feeding him.

He understood, of course, that the fixation, the nearly all-consuming drive to protect, comfort and care for Will Graham, primarily through food, was a way for the child inside him to make amends for Mischa's fate and offer emotional nourishment to that same child Hannibal.

It was a part of himself he had not acknowledged in many years, and now it had reasserted itself loudly.

This was all independent, but supplemental and soon intertwined with the fact that he genuinely adored Will for all he was, all that he could be someday when he accepted and learned to love himself.

Loving Will, how could he resist feeding Will?

Watching as he revived to vigorous personality, charm and light, watching as his almost concave belly gradually began filling out to a healthy, slight roundness. Hearing Will moan around a bite of delicious food, made – unbeknownst to him as yet – of the remains from the Ripper's victims. Hannibal could scarcely imagine an experience that would feel more religious to him. More exciting, inspiring, deliriously erotic.

The already formidable chef Dr. Lecter had never been this amazing in the kitchen; he became absolutely unstoppable from the first date with Will, through the weeks of their early courtship that followed. They were so very happy together, redecorating Hannibal's formerly elegant but solitary memory palace with recollections he would cherish always.

He only had a few mild complaints from others to deal with as a result of becoming a committed lover, A Boyfriend. (*Will Graham's* lover! Will Graham's boyfriend, his soulmate...he wanted to shout from proverbial rooftops and act in general like a foolish man in love, right down to being annoying about it and not caring).

Jack Crawford expressed disappointment, since Hannibal could no longer help with Will's case professionally, and then Will lessened his work hours, making him harder to pin down, making Jack get used to getting by without Will when he had to.

And his patients fretted that Dr. Lecter didn't have as much time for sessions as he used to. His acquaintances from Baltimore's lofty arts and culture scene, who believed themselves his "friends," lamented his absence from recent events. He did intend to bring Will out to show him off in all his favored settings, while continuing to spoil the boy terribly.

All in due time. He liked keeping Will to himself and guarding him, his most precious possession. Every shy smile, laugh and kiss, every intimate caress and many more lover's secrets, his own treasure, no one else's. Will belonged to Hannibal and Hannibal *alone* – and always would. Always *must.* Hannibal would not hear of any other possible end to their story – except that it must not have an ending at all.

***

So far as physical intimacy was concerned, he and Will had taken it slow; very slow by Hannibal's own past standards.

Since his teenage years, Hannibal had been a deeply sexual being and enjoyed indulging every dirty, taboo, scrumptious way to explore pleasure. His college era was the stuff of raunchy legend, to be sure.

The flavor of excitement died too soon on his tongue after each encounter failed to provide the connection his heart yearned for, despite his best efforts at complete, cold independence. Something warm in him wanted to spread that warmth, to nurture and truly love.

And before now, it had never particularly mattered to him how his lovers felt about anything, except that he tried to give them a pleasurable experience before he showed them the door, politely.

The door would be shown *im*politely, in the few cases where ex-lovers proved rude or impossible to dissuade from pursuing him after he'd made a clean, clear break. It would then become the *kitchen* door. This was wholly understandable and excusable in his view. One must know when "no" means "no."

He *did* care about how Will felt, regarding sex. Regarding so many things. The feeling, to care so much, when all he'd known of sex and dating in the past were fleeting, cold one night stands, truly hurt him. Loving Will was like running into the same savagely sharp knife again and again, by choice. He went on relishing every flash of pain as Will burrowed deeper into his heart, making him someone new.

Or perhaps a better version of his real self.

***

The first night that Hannibal had Will over for dinner, he made veal cutlets and herb-stem gremolata. The meat was derived from a rude man who had cut Hannibal off in traffic before shouting obscenities at him in a fit of road rage. That imbecile had been nothing better than meat, and put to better use in this way.

After all, he had a very hungry boy on his hands and took the responsibility seriously.

He pulled Will's chair out from the table, breathing on his neck as he murmured, "I hope you'll enjoy. This is one of my favorite recipes."

Will's cheeks turned a beguiling shade of pink. "Thank you. I...uh, sometimes it's not easy for me to eat when I'm excited...I'm excited tonight. But I'll try to have some."

When Will gave him a heartfelt, innocent smile, Hannibal's heart squeezed in affectionate panic at how fragile he looked, even more frail than before their trip to Minnesota. Perhaps the travel back home had drained his energy.

Hannibal needed to know more about his ailment, ironically now fulfill Jack's original assignment of discerning whether it was psychological or physical.

But he must be careful about asking too many questions. Will was no fan of being prodded in such a way, and he was not eager to add himself to the line of busy-bodies interrogating the young man about his life and habits.

"Please, I'll be honored if you try at least a bite or two," he ventured, pouring two glasses of red wine that would compliment the flavors perfectly.

What a romantic evening. He had set the scene with a stunning centerpiece, resplendent with fresh flowers and fruit, and they were to dine by candlelight. As he took up his own seat and placed his napkin in his lap, he smiled across the table at the weak, pale boy, so handsome, ravishing, his obsession.

His heart leapt as Will began eating, first with a tentative, small bite of "veal" (although the man he'd killed earlier had bleated more like a lamb) that rapidly became two, then three, as if Will was...intoxicated by the food.

"Oh, my God, this is delicious," Will raved, barely remembering to slow down and chew, as it seemed.

"I'm delighted to hear you say it, and possibly even more so simply to sit here and watch you enjoying it. I've seen myself as a chef, in my own humble fashion, for several years, yet never before have I taken this much joy in the fruits of my labor."

Will swallowed another large bite of meat which he'd dipped in the herb sauce before spearing a baby potato as well, making himself the perfect forkful. "Mmm. Now, wait a minute." Will grinned and raised his eyebrows, teasing. "*You, humble?"*

"Perhaps you humble me," Hannibal blushed, biting his lip for a beat; Will watched this, licking his own lips. With their heated gazes, they devoured one another as much as the meal that evening, and many more that followed.

They became each other's drug.

***

After dinner, he took Will into his library and they sat by the fire with another glass of wine, simply talking, sharing their experiences, hopes and dreams. Hannibal endeavored not to edit himself unless it was necessary to conceal the truth about the Ripper. Entranced, he listened to every word Will said, speaking slowly, as if he too was selective with sharing truths. That made the confidence more precious, the pearls offered from Will's tightly clamped shell.

"Um, why did you say that I humble you, earlier?" Will asked curiously, blushing again.

The fireplace hosted a comforting blaze that cast the boy's beautiful face in flickers of light, illuminating the many details, those features Hannibal could never get his fill of gazing upon. Will looked just as skinny, but much healthier in complexion and energy, since they had dinner. The experience was a profound aphrodisiac for Hannibal, but he settled for a hand on Will's knee and a warm squeeze.

"You don't let people in, but you let me in. I'm not used to wanting anyone, you see, and so, for you to take the time to get to know me and invite me into your life means...more than you know, perhaps more than I know how to describe." He spoke low and tenderly, caressing Will's face, sweeping a glossy curl behind that cute ear as Will turned redder in the face with an anxious (happily anxious) little laugh.

“You sweet talk all your conquests?” Will said, shifting closer and moving Hannibal’s hand up to his thigh with a quiet sound of pleasure to feel the strong grip there.

“You’re not a conquest, and it’s not sweet talk.” Hannibal grinned, which felt strange and new, so seldomly did he smile that widely until now. “But then, you’re well-aware of that, aren’t you? You want to hear me say it, again and again, it seems.”

“Say what?” Will feigned cluelessness.

He smirked, even more healthy color coming back into his face as his breathing went from a thin rattle to a smooth process. His voice had been hoarse when he first arrived and now came out clean and clear.

“How special you are to me,” Hannibal assured him, leaning in to softly kiss his sweet lips. “How I have thought of nothing at all but you from our first meeting. How happy it makes me to have you here, to see you eat well and share a piece of my formerly solitary life with you. Only you.”

Will tasted of the bold fruity notes from the wine and the decadent flavor of pure desire.

Dizzy on the taste, he shared his own with Will many times, but slowly, savoring, gentle yet passionate. He held Will reverently, noticing how bony and gaunt Will’s body was. When it made his heart clutch with more tense worry, Will murmured between perfect kisses, “Hannibal, I won’t break if you take me to bed, I promise.”

He drew Hannibal’s hand to his heart, letting him feel the strong, quickening beat. And then he kissed Hannibal’s fingers, one by one. He licked Hannibal’s finger, looking up at the older man with seductive motives.

Instead of finding Hannibal’s professions of devotion preposterous or even signs that his date was unstable, Will consumed every affectionate word and each gentle caress like a flower soaking up sunlight.

Hannibal wanted to treat him with the adoration and worship he deserved, and he could tell that Will was quietly frantic to have sex, giving him pause despite his own roaring desire.

“Are you well, darling? You seem impatient,” Hannibal smiled, pulling back from the latest kiss to smooth a hand over the rumpled curls. “There’s no hurry. And never will be with me.”

“I guess you’re not like most people I’ve dated.” Will sighed. “Usually if I don’t want to hop in bed pretty soon, they’re out the door. Haven’t dated in a while, but still, it’s what I’m used to. But I do want you, Hannibal, very much.”

“Oh, do you?” Hannibal kissed him again slyly. “Do you indeed? How convenient, to want that which you already have in spades. What would you say to staying here with me overnight, and kissing, holding each other while we sleep? Before that, I’d love to share some of my art and favorite books with you.”

“That sounds so amazing,” Will said, on the verge of tears. “You’re so *amazing.* To want to spend time with me just for me?”

“I’ve told you I cannot think of anything or anyone else but you, sweetheart. Considering this is the case, I would never toss aside my concerns for your emotional and physical well-being simply to race into a sexual relationship that will come in due time, when it feels right to you.”

“*Ohh*,” Will trembled as Hannibal stroked the side of his face like fragile porcelain, priceless, to be protected. The older man kissed his neck with that same luxurious and pampering attitude, and Will clung to his arms, breathless. “God. I love the way you make me feel.”

“Then the plan is working,” Hannibal enthused, the honesty in this statement grounding them both, providing a sense of comfort and safety in their connection which surprised him.

He had always assumed that being in love would be a horror show of constant crises wherein the other would try to steal his independence or abandon him, toy with his heart and such. But this was nothing like that.

In another life, if he met a Will Graham who was not starving, the pace and style of his plan would be radically different. Will’s hunger struck a nerve and a chord in him that nothing else might have done. Yet still, no matter how risky or dangerous the plan might be in any alternate universe, Hannibal knew the endgame would always be to have Will in his life, so close they could never be parted.

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“I have to ask you, darling...” Hannibal kissed Will’s forehead as they cuddled in his big, sumptuous bed the following morning.

He had canceled his appointments and Will had the day off, so they lingered in bed, kissing, hugging, wrapping arms and legs around one another, feeling their warmth and how their bodies felt so good pressing and fitting together. Smelling one another, trying to memorize each detail, then laughing when they caught the other – they knew exactly what was going on with the subtle sniffing.

Lazy caresses and quiet, sultry conversation with plenty of laughter had already made this a morning he would never forget.

“What is it?” Will asked groggily. He was so sleep-deprived that Hannibal could tell this lounging around automatically had him close to slumber. That was good; he must rest in order to heal. His smile was dazed, so happy, and his eyes alight with affection, even hope.

“Your weight and the unusually pale state of your complexion. Your nearly perpetual exhaustion. I wish for *nothing* more than I wish to heal you. I ask as your physician, your therapist and your soon to be lover, please give me some indication. I can then help you.”

“You think it’s an eating disorder? Or a ringworm, maybe? Chronic depression? Anorexia?” Will ticked them off his fingers, yawning. “None of the above.” He kissed Hannibal’s hairy

chest, smiling in continued fascination with the older man's powerful body.

At least Will did not seem offended.

"I realize that many people probably ask you these questions for the wrong reasons."

Will laughed, looking up from his comfortable position with his head on Hannibal's chest. He nudged the older man playfully with his knee. "And you're asking because you want to be my doctor, my therapist and my lover? That's...entirely above board."

"It isn't," Hannibal admitted, smiling and playing with Will's hair as their legs nestled together. "But I have multiple fields of expertise that I may be able to apply in order to help you. No matter what, if I need to use unconventional methods, such as crossing lines of professional etiquette, so be it. I'll do what I must. I don't want to push you away by mentioning it, but the first day I saw you, you looked so frail and gaunt...I feared you were close to death even as I fell in love with you."

"In love?" Will blushed and hid his face, kissing Hannibal's chest with a sigh. "Hannibal, you can't push me away. Ask me anything, tell me anything. I won't want this to end, unconventional or not."

"Darling, the best things in life are unconventional," Hannibal said with the tone of a cheerful expert. More seriously he added, "Can you tell me why you've gotten this thin? And clearly malnourished, faint, other symptoms, I'm sure."

"Eh, hunger pangs, headaches, dizziness, foggy thinking, hallucinations, loss of certain motor skills. Also, I recently made out with my therapist? Were you ever my therapist, officially? Well, I did make out with him, twice, in fact, and then slept with him. Hey, *just slept*," he winked, grinning again. "So far."

"Will," Hannibal sighed and hugged him close. "Is it an eating disorder?"

"Of sorts." Will closed his eyes. "I've thought for a while now that I don't *deserve* to eat. I was never…*good* enough, I was selfish and destructive, and I didn't ever want to hurt someone again. I didn't have the nerve to end it more definitively, so...I just stopped eating. Until inevitably, my starvation became so unbearable I'd stuff the nearest meal in my mouth, staving off the inevitable. Counterproductive, I know. Maybe no one talks enough about how much hunger hurts."

"No, they don't," Hannibal agreed solemnly.

He closed his eyes too, blocking out the memories of that winter when he was eight and lost his whole world, then lived in starvation until rescue arrived. And he wondered if Will closed his eyes for the same reason, to keep the past from intruding into his thoughts to poison the current happiness.

"Since meeting you, and especially, realizing you actually reciprocated my feelings, I...don't mind trying to eat." Will clasped Hannibal's face and caressed his cheek, then traced his

features slowly, in wonderment. “I was so happy when I could actually chew and swallow dinner. Nothing ever tasted that good. Maybe that’s just you.”

Hannibal kissed him and nuzzled their faces together. “Perhaps it’s us.”

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Will knew something was wrong with the meat. But he didn’t want to think about it, so he didn’t.

Night after night, he returned to Hannibal, until they realized it was silly since Will had no real reason to go “home,” and their relationship had never been about game playing. Except for this one thing, their mutual, silent agreement that Will would eat what Hannibal served and enjoy every luscious mouthful, and they wouldn’t discuss the origin of the gamey cuisine.

It was easy to be distracted as he was romanced from head to toe, seduced emotionally, intellectually, spiritually, sexually, until he wanted to breathe Hannibal like oxygen. Being away from him was the pain Will tried to avoid above almost all else.

Will still did not hunt in the ways of his kind, that was his remaining reservation. But it seemed...now he did not need to.

When he got home from work, he would find Hannibal waiting in the kitchen with a glass of whatever amazing vintage wine he’d chosen to pair with the meal he was busy cooking. He was in his apron, with his smile almost shy, always surprised anew to see Will come home to him. Hannibal asked about his day, then pulled a chair out at the island counter so Will could sit down.

They would talk, sharing everything on their minds (almost), and Will would offer to help cook or clean up; Hannibal refused. Instead, Will would be granted an early “sneak preview” taste of sauces, gravies, creamy potatoes, rich and meaty stews, rib-eyes, or the items Hannibal called by names such as “chicken thighs,” “cow’s tongue,” or liver and kidneys always presented as animal meat.

Hannibal seemed almost delirious when he watched Will eat what he prepared. There was no doubt in Will’s mind that the obsession came from a deep-seated psychological need which Hannibal might not have fully understood until now.

The man was absolutely smitten, starstruck and insistent on serving Will in everything, flattering him, kissing and even hand-feeding sometimes.

When he agreed to sit in Hannibal’s lap while the older man slowly, blissfully fed him dinner and dessert, Will knew it was kinky as hell. He knew they were both getting off on it; the act made his skin feel hot all over in a way that had nothing to do with his feverish condition of the past.

It wasn’t so long ago, he’d languished in an excruciating limbo, and now instead of chills and sweat from starvation he felt shivers of pleasure, a sheen of aroused perspiration and an

exquisite nervousness mirrored in Hannibal's eyes.

One night, which turned out to be a special one, Will asked, "Do you think you'll still love me after you fatten me up?"

Hannibal laughed. He lowered the spoon after giving Will another bite of "steak" dipped in the best damn mashed potatoes ever and a scrumptious gravy. Will was also fed baby peas, and often Hannibal reminded him of the importance in eating all the food groups, laughing when Will insisted the only two food groups were red meat and starches.

"I'm not fattening you up like a cow to slaughter, darling. I'm making you healthy. And look how well you've progressed under my care, the good, obedient boy that you are."

The praise turned the tips of Will's ears red. "*Aww*," he said dismissively, overwhelmed.

"Look how you glow, how bright your eyes and smile appear. Your vigor of mind and body. You are a beautiful creature inside and out, but never more than now, at the height of health and stunning, youthful perfection. Have you ever considered the theory that very good things come to the best, most special boys?"

He knew what he was doing; answering Will's question in a hopelessly romantic manner, showering him in the praise that inevitably made Will's heart fill with pride and joy to bursting. Nothing made Will happier than making Hannibal glad and proud, to satisfy Hannibal's expectations and accept his obsessive love with gratitude. And more obedience.

"I never knew what happiness was until I met you," Will said softly. He was sitting as usual (by now) in his lover's lap, and let out a gasp as he felt Hannibal getting hard beneath him, pressing firmly to his ass and thigh.

They kissed, sharing all the dark, indulgent flavors of another delectable meal, full of nourishment and aphrodisiacs to heighten their already lust-wild moods.

Restraint should be Hannibal's middle name, Will mused. He had never seen someone with such superb, almost infuriating self-control. Yet his severe discipline of himself, how he held back his obvious need to ravish Will, were also a massive turn-on.

It gave Will the good kind of dizzy spell to be the focus of all that pent-up passion and lust. He wanted to open the floodgates and be carried off in the older man's currant, letting the coursing depths carry him anywhere, everywhere, it didn't matter. As long as he could be inundated, smothered and overfed by Hannibal's love and sex, he would be beyond happy.

"Honey?" Will knew how it made Hannibal blush when he used old-fashioned, domestic pet names on him. Predictably and delightfully, his lover's cheeks turned pink as his face lit up.

"Yes, darling?"

God, the 1950's sitcom of it all, mixed with the undercurrent of strange, haunting kinkiness that frightened Will and enticed him all at once. He was so aroused that not for the first time,

he knew it would take only the slightest touch from this man's perfect, beautiful, adoring hands to make him come harder than he ever had in his life.

With his best "good boy" smile and pure mischief in his eyes, Will played with Hannibal's smooth, fancy suit, his pale pink shirt, the floral tie that went oddly well with the plaid jacket.

"There are a few things I don't know and some of them I never can," Will guessed with a saucy thoughtfulness. "For example, how these colors and patterns come together to make you a sex god who ought to have a series of kinky paperback romances based on him."

"It is simply called 'fashion' my dear, or, 'style,' of course." With a prim smile, Hannibal gave Will back the same mischief he received. "Even you've taken to it of late, to splendid effect."

Will glanced down at his own elegant attire. Although he was barefoot with tousled hair, totally relaxed, he still wore an outfit Hannibal had given him, a snugly tailored blue-gray designer suit that showed off the lines of his healthy, robust, yet fit figure. And he tried in his own bashful way to drive Hannibal crazy, leaving his collar open, revealing a long, smooth neck which ached to be kissed and bitten. His skin was still pale and creamy, but his blush was deeper and his complexion no longer fit the old adjectives he once suffered under – *pasty, drawn, wan, sallow*, etc.

"You tell me I'm glowing, and I feel it. But I think it's your love glowing out of me, like it's pouring from my body, sunshine rays shooting out," Will laughed. He bit his lip, intimidated all over again by this handsome, bigger and older man so completely in his own power, caring only for him. "I know how you've done it, cherishing me and pampering me, filling my days and nights with fun, relaxation, wonderful meals, the sweetest, most nourishing conversation of my life. You've introduced me to a form of contentment blended with excitement…which keeps shocking me once again as it grows more intense rather than ebbing away. Most couples talk about losing the spark, but even if you finally let your guard down enough to seduce me thoroughly, I believe our spark will blaze stronger than ever."

"I never wanted you to feel any obligation towards me," Hannibal explained carefully, despite the rigid fact of his hardness so close to Will's aching body. "And my first concern was devoting weeks to your recovery. Perhaps in using so much of my professional ability, mixing it in our domestic bliss, I've often confused us both. I held back, wanting you to...be ready, for me. Strong enough to know exactly what you want, clear-headed enough to know love from gratitude."

"Hannibal Lecter." Will tsked and shook his head. "I loved you before you started feeding me and giving me bubble baths and massages, reading me poetry and giving me roses. I loved you for you, almost right away, and the only reason it took me a few hours to let the fact of you sink under my skin where it belongs was my own miserable self-hatred and resignation to death."

"I never want you to question your worth again. I never, never want you to think you do not deserve to feast on all the best life has to offer. Take it on your own terms, Will, no matter how unconventional your choices." Hannibal spoke very seriously, and Will knew they weren't just talking about their relationship.

He sensed Will's dark nature, his violent tendencies, his bloodlust and the feeling of righteous satisfaction he got from the occasional villain he shot down in the field. And rather than trying to change Will, he kept encouraging the younger man to Become all that he was, everything natural in him being beautiful, exquisite, a blossoming Hannibal intended to enjoy to the utmost degree. *That*, Will knew, was love.

Hannibal's ardent words made Will's heart throb with love as well, with the addiction of this passion and the knowledge that selfish, grisly, horrible or not, he would never leave, no matter what was in the food.

Nothing could tear him from his man, certainly not the conscience in him which began making countless exceptions the first time their lips touched. From that time, he was lost to Hannibal, too needy for him to ask the right questions or care for any resolution of mysteries which would only drive a wedge between them.

"I don't want anything between us," Will explained in a low, sensuous tone, unbuttoning his own collar further, revealing his chest, then Hannibal's, surprised at his smooth boldness. He was so strong now, capable, as Hannibal had said, of taking whatever he liked. He was about to, that was for damn sure. "I want us to be one, forever."

Will slipped loose Hannibal's tie, running the fine, glossy fabric over his sensitive hands, every inch of his skin brimming with fresh life and vivid energy, plus wild sensitivity. "If you want to use your beautiful ties to bind me and take me however you like, you can. If you want to spank me when I break one of your petty, stuck-up little etiquette rules, go for it. You can edge me until I sob past morning light, or you can take me vanilla on my back, so deep in me I'll never see that position the same way again. But Hannibal?

"Mmm, yes, Will?" He stared at Will, his favorite work of art, his dark angel, the center of his universe.

They were putting the missing pieces of each other back together using pieces of their own hearts. It was some romantic form of patchwork galvanism and it was every kind of wrong that made it right.

"Just don't make me wait another night for you to take me. To be inside me, to let us be one. Do what you want with me, I mean it. Show me your love, I'm yours. It's my choice, my eyes are open, never more so," he swallowed hard past the urge to cry.

He wasn't looking at the answer to the question of the meat which had so revived him, but because he knew, essentially, what must lay behind the door and accepted it in his own frightened, gradual way, as an inevitability for their love to survive and thrive. Will's eyes were as open as his heart, and as full of Hannibal.

Whatever remnant of control Hannibal had left disappeared abruptly with Will's speech. He stood hurriedly, dragging Will up with him as their lips met in a hard, passionate kiss full of sloppy tongues and sharp teeth, a kiss such as he had never given Will before. With a husky groan, he shoved the plates, silverware and glasses to the floor with a loud crash and laid Will down on the table of their incomparable, taboo feasts, the altar of their religion. They needed no other faith but this.

Hannibal made love to Will right there, against a red satin tablecloth, with Will spread naked and trembling beneath his powerful, expertly sensuous form. All of that flushed, healthier skin was covered in the kisses and bites, licks and sucks that had filled Will's fantasies since the first day they talked, and Hannibal simply *feasted* on Will, more voraciously than he'd ever taken food or drink.

He bestowed a heavy, inescapable fervor on Will, replete with shockingly strong, all-consuming, white-hot orgasms, one after another, as if Hannibal could make Will's body do anything, and he would.

Not for the first time, Will wondered, even through the wild haze of their sex, while Hannibal sucked his cock relentlessly, expertly, perfectly, and then applied his stunning oral skills to the younger man's hole, licking and getting him wet, getting him even *needier*, which was a miracle, he wondered if Hannibal could sense that he wasn't human.

When a succubus had sex, they truly did glow, at least a little. It wasn't something Will could control. He had his secrets, Hannibal had his.

Hannibal let Will be himself, watched in awe as his lover's body, now with a toned but round and healthy stomach, firm biceps and so much soft, pale skin, began the low-level throb of fluttering light.

Will controlled the manifestation of his true nature to the extent he could control *anything* under the circumstances. Hannibal was bound to learn of Will's real form and origin, just as Will was destined to learn every devastating, terrible secret the doctor held in that one, most important facet of his way to love Will, the way he *fed*.

They'd unpeel the remaining skin from one another's hearts and souls, then feed more on the spirit and life of all the ugly truths that others would turn from in dread. Will wondered if he would treasure the worst of Hannibal above all else, because what could be more deeply and truly Hannibal than that which he could not help, his darkest compulsions, his animal side?

Hannibal was insatiable. He sucked Will's nipples and bit them, and his teeth felt sharper still when he left a teeming bruise on Will's arm, then his thigh, strategically marking and moaning at the flavor of his flesh. He was more than human too, he was a beast.

"You broke all your beautiful things," Will said, turning in a dizzy tumult of delight to laugh at the broken glass and china, the scattered remains of the indulgent feast on the previously pristine floor.

"Good," Hannibal growled, biting his neck harder, finding olive oil, one of the few items not smashed to the floor, and using it to lubricate his thick fingers.

He pushed two of them in with ease, for his oral sex had been so stunning and long-lasting that Will was relaxed and his body more begging for penetration than anything, certainly his muscles would offer minimum resistance. Will's back arched and Hannibal smirked, pressing him back down to the table with a hand flat on his smooth stomach, stroking him all over it, over the place he had made full, the part of Will he'd healed, the hunger he'd fed.

Moaning at the feeling of Will's softer belly, he began to scissor more firmly and deeply, biting at the small roundness that had grown under his care, then lavishing his eager mouth in open kisses on the younger man's chest, over ribs that no longer threatened to protrude through the skin, over a heart that beat strong, vibrant, *ready*.

The light shimmered in his skin and Hannibal kissed him, too profoundly moved by their religious ritual to ask questions now, when he could simply absorb and take, and give everything they needed, all that mattered.

He worshiped Will's body until they were both breathless, slamming his hand in harder now, giving Will another orgasm from prostate stimulation, more cum spurting from Will's cock to be licked by his lover in wild swirls of his tongue, relentless sucking. Utmost savoring. Nothing more than the need for more.

The walls seemed to echo with their cries and gasps, their resounding moans, as Hannibal finally pressed his engorged, huge cock deep into Will, clutching his lover's body to his own in a vice grip, the two of them moving with rhythmic, raw grace as their limbs slipped and slid, sweaty and slick. Their bodies began to shift and undulate in waves that felt like breathing in and out.

Will held onto Hannibal for dear life, because life was dear to him again now, so much that he never wanted to leave it – and he'd so nearly given it up before he had a chance to meet this man! The thought made him hold on even tighter as Hannibal kissed him feverishly, greedily, but giving, giving, rolling his hips, plunging them up and down a rollercoaster of butterflies, electricity, delirium.

Yes, he was a lover with eclectic, cultivated skills, but his love was present, his obsession written into every shove of his hips that drove his cock in deeper to Will's hot, tight walls. The pleasure, the unbelievable glory of their joining –

"This," Will whispered, as one does in a quiet church, though it was a pause between their loud, shameless cries of ecstasy, "This is our own secret ceremonial."

Hannibal understood without needing any reasons now for the light pulsing under Will's skin. "Yes," he breathed hotly against Will's lips, "Yes, yes..."

And "yes" was better than Amen by far.

Will wrapped himself around his lover with all his now considerable strength and took the rough, thick might of him bravely, euphorically. He was more than worthy or loved; he was whole, finally, and there was no turning back.

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"How beautiful," Hannibal marveled hours later, when a few more rounds of erotic worship left them tumbled on the library floor, the rug warm beneath Will, the firelight flickering off the crystal luminescence of his skin.

Hannibal ran his hand reverently over the shining flesh, murmuring in a voice wrecked by pleasure, strained by vigorous exercise, “More than beautiful. I know so many languages.” He kissed Will and punctuated the gentle presses of his lips with the word “beautiful” in many languages. “None of those will do, I’m afraid.”

“You won’t ask me why or how?” Will stared up at him, relieved but certainly surprised.

“You shared this with me,” Hannibal said, as if this was the most precious gift he could imagine. “You gave me so much of yourself, your truth, the luscious strangeness of you which you fear to indulge, you’ve let me consume it to the last dregs. Our ceremonial left you open to interrogation or rejection, yet you knew I never would. You’ll receive nothing from me but the same worship, and as you say, it will only grow, spreading like vines to bind us ever closer.”

He pressed his hand to the thundering heartbeat of his enraptured lover. “All too human,” he mused ecstatically, quietly, intently joyful. “Yet so much more than human. I never want you to douse your light again, save for the basic necessity of concealing its power from outsiders.”

“From humans?” Will chuckled, “But aren’t you human, too, love?”

Hannibal smiled and petted through the younger man’s wildly messed up curls. “Hmm. That’s true. I feel I’ve been granted an enchanted second sight by virtue of loving you...my angel?”

“Well.” Will cleared his throat. Impossible to be one hundred percent nervous about the Succubus Talk when his whole body ached pleasantly with afterglow. “Not exactly an angel.”

“Demon?” Hannibal stared at him, the suggestion making him even more pious.

“Of a kind.” Will made reluctant eye contact.

In Hannibal’s gaze, he found the acceptance once again that made him feel what it was to truly live.

He allowed his eyes to flash in their crimson-jewel sharpness, a tiny sliver of hell’s depths contained within him, which was that he was born from, born to serve. That which he defied, yet, at least physically, biologically, everything he was.

Hannibal’s breath caught at the red flare. “My love. What wonders you hold. I’m so endlessly lucky to hold them in my hands, to feel their majestic and exultant glory making me, for however brief a time, more than human, too. Perhaps to love you is to exceed the human capacity for love; to make love to you feels like a higher height still.”

“A lower depth,” Will smirked, still a tiny bit hesitant and insecure.

“It could be the same thing. Remember, Dante imagined Hell upside down and inside out, as to structure and form.”

“You.” Will rolled his eyes and scoffed, tickling Hannibal’s stomach and making him laugh affably, adoringly. With a playful, harmless tug of chest hair Will added, “That’s just a poem, it’s not the real hell. I’m the real hell. You’ve harnessed it tonight, made me yours as I asked. I’m forever grateful.”

“Was Dante really that far off the mark?” Hannibal traced Will’s face, then his neck, slowly running his fingers down over his collarbones and the shapes of his shoulders.

“Fine, fine,” Will groaned, though he quivered pleasantly under the sweet caresses, “He wasn’t *that* far off. Or, I thought he was until *my* whole world was turned upside down and inside out. If I could be this wrong about how happy I can be, what else will flip my expectations and understanding on its head and force me to see deeper truths? Right-side out is beginning to lose its rather flavorless appeal.”

“You’ll never dine on bland fare when you’re with me,” Hannibal assured him emphatically.

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Hannibal appreciated Will’s discretion in not pressing him for the truth of his cannibalism. The most which his lover had ventured towards this was a rather sly comment, asking Hannibal if there was a ‘secret ingredient’ in all this food which had healed him.

“Other than true love?” He laughed, although it was actually quite true, and nudged his foot against Will’s under the table as they ate their morning scramble of sausage and eggs.

“Mmm.” A coy smile, curls falling across his boy’s brow. He took a nice big bite of the sausage and eggs which Hannibal had layered on a buttery triangle of toast.

These days, Will glowed in the morning, not always with the mysterious shimmer of their lovemaking, but with his health and delight. Hannibal continued the fond foot play and added frankly, “Yes, there is something special and very unusual in the meals, other than true love, my love.”

Will giggled at the latest serving of adorably dorky love talk that nonetheless rang true. He couldn’t get enough of it; it was one of his hungers that would not go away. If he could be here with Hannibal always, cared for in every way by this man, he would be on cloud nine… not generally somewhere demons were allowed. Yet no one could stop them from being happy. Could they? He and Hannibal were powerful together in a unique manner that anyone ought to fear. And the idea of love in Hannibal’s cooking, after all, was not a metaphor and never had been.

With another musical laugh, Will said, “I used to wonder, in the back of my mind, whether you were putting drops of your own blood in my food. I thought, perhaps you were dabbling in black magic or devil worship. Then...I knew it was something more.”

“What is the ‘something more’ which you think I’ve fed you?”

Hannibal was curious at Will’s deferring the full disclosure when given the open chance of the older man’s confession.

Will guessed, “Something more than God or law would allow, something more than I, once, would have forgiven, even as I admired certain parts of that ritual. Your solitary pining, I think, drove you especially towards the punishment of the wicked. But you will always need to do this, especially because of me. And so…I have to deal with you, and my feelings about this subject, slowly, carefully. For years, I fought to find the light despite my nature being the snuffing out of all holiness, all goodness.”

“But you are good.”

“Perhaps the lines between good and evil are much blurrier than I realized. I think you’re teaching me that. I need to let the full story wait until...I’ve allowed the barest suspicion of it to permeate. Give me time? Or else, surprise me one day with some creative method of telling me, some sweet sacrifice in my honor. Your choice.”

Hannibal began to clear their dishes, doting on his lover as always, kissing his forehead before placing the dishes in the sink.

Will drank his coffee with a subtle smile, already knowing which choice Hannibal would embrace. He questioned to himself if Hannibal had thought about why Will thrived so on human meat, specifically. It would not be so obvious from the outside.

After all, Will had told the truthful, yet misleading tale of a depressed and self-hating man with an eating disorder, a death wish. He might be any other form of demon or fallen angel of which there were many, many more than were recorded in human books, superstitions, fearful prayers and legends.

So, they each held one vital secret in their hearts to be exchanged another time...when it was *time*. Their instincts had led them this far so deftly; why not let them ramble on, on instinct alone, and find in this course of action, their revelation, total honesty, the permanent bonding it would bring?

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Hannibal got Will his dogs back. Will had mentioned giving his seven beloved pets to a family on a farm near Wolf Trap with such sadness. He explained that he had thought, when he did this several months before, he was going to die. He didn’t want his last days to be spent in feral disintegration in their presence. The other reason, the threat of eating them in the worst throes of starvation, he did not put voice to yet. The time was nearing. Their clock ticked ever so delicately.

Will had a plan for Hannibal’s immortality; he knew they had all the time in the world.

The day he welcomed his pack to their home in Baltimore was one of the happiest of Will’s life. Hannibal had paid the family a ridiculous sum of money to get them all back for Will, and the gesture was worth more than countless thousands of fortunes to the older man. Just to make Will smile, there was nothing he would not do, but to see his boy *elated* and so innocently delighted was simply sublime.

The dogs almost knocked Will right over when they saw him, jumping on him in loving joy, pawing and licking at him, smelling his familiar scent, that of flowers too brightly alive right before the moment of death. All succubi smelled like that; it was a lulling agent if applied more strongly than Will ever used it. Even when Hannibal knew that, Will bet he would still claim that Will's scent was one of a kind. His favorite.

When he saw Will hugging and petting the dogs, stable and solid, able to care for them as a loving and attentive owner again, Hannibal was again swept away by blissful wonderment, proud and gratified his feeding of the beautiful boy had allowed this to happen.

Hannibal knew he must never, *ever* let Will go hungry again, and that the more Will let his dark side come out to play, the more satiated his darling's heart and soul would be. Whatever Will was, he did have a form of a soul, Hannibal could sense it without knowing how. They would *save* each other's souls, and part of that meant that Hannibal must bring the boy finally to his Becoming.

***

As a birthday gift, Hannibal sent Will his former patient Randall Tier. The poor young man really did need to be put down; he was glorious in his own vicious way, but he killed innocents and showed no sign of stopping.

Hannibal knew Will was investigating Randall's string of murders and would be quick to move against the beastly young man in the animal guise.

Will needed no costume nor any pretense to be *much* more vicious than Randall, Hannibal suspected. He could taste it in Will's kiss, and he wanted the blood of their victims to flavor new ones.

He hadn't thought he was taking a risk at the time, when he gave Randall directions to the Wolf Trap house, knowing Will would be there packing up some of his belongings, still moving his possessions over to Hannibal's Baltimore house, now *their* home. It had been his assumption that Will would defeat Randall easily, but suddenly, as night fell and he knew what was about to happen in Wolf Trap, he started to worry.

Standing in the kitchen in that elegant home which felt empty without Will, filling the dogs' bowls, he glanced at the pets and saw them looking back at him with serious expressions. He supposed he was only imagining they knew that he had put their master in danger, but he took the imaginary dog advice to heart. After all, it was what he wanted to hear. It was, *go to Will, make sure he is alright, save him if need be.*

***

The woods were dark and deep. Hannibal had parked at Will's former house and started into the forest in search of his lover, knowing that Randall liked to stalk victims from within nature's thorny, perilous embrace. There were a few animals out in these woods at night that might bite a human, but none so deadly as Randall. Hannibal felt cold and clammy and wished he hadn't toyed with his ex-patient, wondered if he'd been too confident and

presumptuous of the outcome– he had to find Will – his heart thumped hard and picked up speed –

Hannibal heard a terrible howl that seemed to split the quiet night in two, tearing the universe like a page ripped from its book. With a fearful gasp, Hannibal ran in the direction of the noise.

He couldn't remember anything else that had prompted him to actually *run*, not since...not since the last days with Mischa. He was nearly as worried now; perhaps he'd foolishly triggered those old fears.

Finally, he stepped into a clearing; in his distracted anxiety he stepped on a small branch that made a snapping sound. He stared, as an animal bent over a ravaged and bloody prey looked up at him when the noise interrupted his feeding frenzy.

The animal was Will; Randall was the prey.

Will snarled and went back to eating Randall Tier, having easily felled him in battle, proving Hannibal's initial predictions true. The boy was devouring him with shocking gluttony. With sharp claws and ruthless fangs he would rip off a chunk of skin and muscle gushing with blood and eat it, making eerie hungry sounds and hums of satisfaction with every bite. It was like the way he ate what Hannibal gave him at home, but more...fully enacted. The *ritual*, stripped of all dignity, brought down to the raw, savage truth of this gorgeous, blood-soaked boy.

As his skin glowed in a pulsing pattern, undulating in shocking white, glimmering light, he licked his fingers, finally understanding who had approached. He smiled. An evil smile, yet an adorable smile that melted Hannibal's lovestruck heart.

Oh, God. If he thought Will was beautiful before!

Now Will was crouching as blood dripped horribly from smears on his cheeks and chin, all over his teeth, spilling from his clothes where he'd splashed himself with it in his haste to feed. His brutal violence and greedy appetite were stunning and unforgettable, and his eyes flared in the darkness with a powerful, crimson glow.

"Happy birthday, my love," said Hannibal softly.

He was gentle, but did not fear Will turning on him in his ravenous hunger and feasting. This blood-soaked demon was his own darling love, after all. Hannibal would far rather die by Will's claws and teeth than stay away from him.

Will was coming back to himself now, little by little, though still a bit high on the indulgent, messy feast. He laughed sweetly and sat back against a tree, breathing hard. "Was he my present? The murderer I've been tracking?"

"That's right. He was a former patient. I knew he was the killer from your current case and sent him to you, so that you might embrace your true nature while defeating him. However, I

never dreamed that your glorious Becoming would be this remarkable. You are my wildest dream come true, Will. You're the dream I was always afraid to let into my heart."

"You're not afraid now?" Will looked at him curiously, still dripping blood all over the rough forest floor of grass and dirt gone scarlet-slick.

"No. I'm in awe." He approached and sat down beside his beloved.

Reaching for his hand, he felt he could fully breathe again once Will took it and laced their fingers together. Blood coated them both, shining, wet and black in the moonlight, now. The night was deepening, and so were they.

"Ripper." Will said it matter-of-factly, sucking blood off his own fingers with hungry lips, making low noises of satisfaction that went right to Hannibal's cock.

He would make love to his boy later, wildly, with everything he had in him, as Will deserved. Another birthday gift.

"I get it now," Will continued, thoughtful and ironically amused. "I used to have this weird crush on the Ripper. Should've let myself realize sooner...no...I guess this is better, huh?"

"I think so, darling. We feel ready."

Will nestled against him, peaceful as a quiet child. He put his head on Hannibal's shoulder with a soft little nuzzle and a sigh. "Do you want to save some of him to cook?"

"No, I want you to enjoy him, darling. Every delectable, fortifying morsel. It's your birthday, and you should enjoy your special present."

"You're going to stay here while I finish him off?" Will asked with an amazed smile.

"Oh yes, I wouldn't want to miss a moment, if you don't mind."

"I don't mind," Will said, leaving streaks of blood and gore on Hannibal's skin as he cupped the older man's face and leaned up for a kiss.

"It's enough for you to watch me isn't it?" The otherworldly boy asked. "To know you fed me in this way?"

Hannibal nodded, his heart beating with untamed joy. "Will, it's more than enough. It's happiness incarnate."

"You're a keeper," Will smiled, again so sweetly, kissing his lover's cheek and leaving another smear of scarlet there, before crawling back to Randall's dead form and digging his claws in for another taste, then *another*.

"Thank you for my present," he said between bites and gulps, enjoying every part, just as Hannibal had desired.

Hannibal sat watching, as he would watch any miracle this beautiful and unforgettable, his breath catching as Will became even more greedy, more insatiable. Stronger, better fed, taking what he wanted at last.

Softly, with all his heart, he murmured, “Bon appetit, my love.”

Chapter End Notes

note: there's a little reference to Florence + the Machine's song "Only if for One Night" in this chapter 🖤

End Notes

Fic playlist: https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5cj67laCJtrx4U5LPGbUbw?si=e5c581baf386450b

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